

Time Capsule has 103-year tradition

Historic items, found in Crown ruins, were originally placed by townsfolk in 1890

By SALLY ALVES

Local Historian

When Alf Fischer opened the time capsule rescued from the ruins of the IOOF Swank building last week, neither he nor any of us who witnessed the event could have known that this story began 103 years ago in Camas.

It was a big event on June 10, 1890, in the fledgling town of La Camas, and townsfolk came from miles around to be part of the noteworthy occasion.

Although it was a rainy June morning, more than 100 people gathered in a festive spirit around the empty lot to see the cornerstone placed for the new Lodge 43 IOOF building. Ladies were adorned in their Sunday finery with long dresses (some with bustles), flowered hats, gloves and their Rebekah sashes over their shoulders. Some had umbrellas raised to protect their clothing from the sprinkles. Gents sported business suits. Many wore hats (some white straw) and their Lodge regalia. Hugo E. Schweitzerberg from Albina, Ore., took the photo that became a well-known part of Camas history.

What present day historians did not know, until last week, was that during the June 10, 1890, ceremony, a time capsule was placed in the cornerstone.

In 1905, 15 years after the cornerstone was placed, the wooden two-story IOOF Hall building was finally completed. Considering how quickly buildings were erected in those days, one can only wonder what caused the delay. In any case, the building needed remodeling in late February, 1912. The 1890 cornerstone was retrieved and the contents of the time capsule revealed. A front page story in the March 1, 1912, The Camas Post (published by Arthur A. Hay) headlined "Recall Memories of Other Days," then "Cornerstone of I.O.O.F. Building gives up La Camas News of June, 1890."

The story goes on to say: "Last Thursday workmen who are remodeling the IOOF building removed from the cornerstone many interesting relics, among which was a

copy of the La Camas News, a 7-column, 4-page newspaper of the issue of June 6, 1890, published by C.W. Philbrick." The story details several news items and advertisements found in the 1890 paper and concludes with: "The paper and other relics and a copy of the Camas Post were replaced in the cornerstone, where they will remain possibly until another generation occupies the center of the stage."

Another item found in the 1912 time capsule opening was even more significant. It was an official handwritten paper dated June 10, 1890, documenting the beginnings of the Wide West Lodge 43 I.O.O.F. at La Camas.

The badly decomposed paper states that: "The Lodge was instituted on the 25th day of March, 1896 by G.T. McConnell. The dispensation to institute said Lodge was granted by Grand Master George D. Hill of Seattle and Attested by Grand Secretary L.T. A. Shaw of Walla Walla. The following brothers were instituted on the night of installing the Lodge: C.A. Bates, Bob Bartlett, J.T. Duback, R. Dedrick, James Vernon, A.E. McMasters, James Tallman and Joseph Teason. The Lodge started in with membership of fourteen, it now has a membership of fifty-seven in good standing."

A complete listing of the 1890 membership of the Lodge and Rebekah's follows. The document's final paragraph is: "We have only to recall the loss of our member since the Lodge was instituted of our beloved brother A.E. McMasters."

A copy of the 1889 bylaws and constitution of the La Camas Lodge was included, plus miscellaneous old coins, including one from the Civil War.

The 1912 folks who examined the contents of the 1890 time capsule added their own items when the capsule was reset within the cornerstone. These included the 1912 Camas Post, the 1905 constitution and bylaws of Lodge 43, I.O.O.F. La Camas and the 1911 constitution and bylaws of Florence Rebekah Lodge 19, I.O.O.F. La



MEMBERS OF IOOF Lodge 43 are shown here in 1890 when the original time capsule, found recently in the ruins of the Crown Home Furnishings building, was placed for history. The 103-year tradition will likely be continued with its placement in an expected new Crown building. (Photo courtesy of Sally Alves)

Camas. They also threw in some coins of the day.

When the now "old" IOOF building was torn down in mid-1922, the infamous time capsule was again resurrected and reviewed to the delight of local citizens. This was the beginning of the "flapper" era and the days of "bathtub gin." One can imagine folks pulling up in their dandy new "Stoller Fords" and thinking the unveiling was the "cat's meow!"

The Camas Post May 26, 1922, edition (Geo. W. Hopp, editor and proprietor) ran a story on its front page "Camas Boom Reaches Odd Fellow Block," with a subheading "Architects Engaged to Draw Plans and Specification for New Building."

The story reads: "Camas building improvement boom has extended with the decision to construct a new and up to date Odd Fellow Block on the site of the structure at Fourth and Burton. The firm of Houghtaling and Dougan, architects of Portland, has been engaged to draw plans and specifications for the new building. They also will have the general supervision of construction. This is the firm which drafted the plans for the million dollar Elks Temple in Portland, which is now under construction. Building work on the new I.O.O.F. block here, it is stated, will be under way by the last of June."

Also, Houghtaling and Dougan's was the same architectural firm that designed today's 1925 Spruce Reitz building in Camas.

Those 1922 business leaders placed back into the time capsule all that had gone before plus a 1922 Camas Post, a financial statement from The First National Bank of Camas (This was O.F. Johnson's bank. Johnson most likely loaned money for the building's construction), and a one-page statement by the I.O.O.F. on First National Bank letterhead.

The statement reads: "The following are officers of Wide West Lodge 43 I.O.O.F. Camas, Wash., on this date Sept 6, 1922, when this letter is placed in the steel receptacle which will be buried in the

corner stone of the new Odd Fellows building: E.L. Belknap, Noble Grand; Herbert Smith, Vice Grand; Lewis Philbrick, Secretary; E.H. Tidland, Financial Secretary; Trustees: C.M. Koplin, E.J. Tucker, E.H. Tidland, Building Committee: C.E. Farr, O.F. Johnson, J.J. Harrington, C.M. Koplin, E.H. Tidland."

And so it was that construction on the new I.O.O.F. Swank building was initiated on Sept. 6, 1922, with the placing of the cornerstone. With the building committee comprised of all the town leaders, this must have been a real community effort! They constructed the building in the strongest manner with huge timbers for beams and a stucco exterior. Those 1922 Camas citizens probably thought it would stand for 200 years or longer.

Although fate and fire caught up to the 1922 I.O.O.F. building on July 4, 1993, from the ashes miraculously emerged a well-worn time capsule filled with Camas history.

Fischer plans to rebuild his lovely building sometime in the future, hopefully using the four decorative

building medallions and the dated and signed hidden bricks saved from the demolished ruins. When the cornerstone is placed in the new building with the time capsule intact, there is certain to be a crowd of excited townsfolk to witness the event. Fischer intends to add important items of our day, complete with what can be saved from prior times. The time capsule will reside there in the cornerstone until "another generation occupies the center of the stage."

In the meantime, for us historians, there is much more to be learned from what was revealed on July 20. We can only gratefully thank those 1890 citizens who started this very important 103-year-old tradition.

Camas resident Sally Alves is an active participant in a number of history related organizations including the Camas-Washougal Historical Society, Heritage Trust of Clark County and the Two Rivers Heritage Museum fundraising committee. She is also the author of a book on homes designed by early Camas area architect John Roffler.

Time capsule found in Crown ruins

By CHRIS CLOHESSY

The Post-Record

A little piece of history fell from the rubble of one of downtown Camas' oldest buildings Monday.

A time capsule was found intact yesterday morning in the remains of the Crown Home Furnishings building at the corner of Northeast Fourth Avenue and Cedar Street. The Crown Home Furnishings building was mostly destroyed in a monstrous Fourth of July fire.

Alan Fischer, owner of the furniture store, said workers found an approximately one foot long by three inch in diameter iron cylinder after it fell from a cement pillar near the front entrance of the store at the corner of Fourth and Cedar.

The workers were in the process of tearing down the walls of the structure.

It was determined that the cylinder, with iron caps screwed onto both ends, was a time capsule dating back to the 1922 construction of the building in which it was stored.

In an informal ceremony this morning, Fischer opened the time capsule and displayed the contents.

A list of the contents found in the capsule includes several coins; three newspapers, including a 1912 and 1922 Camas Post and an 1890 LaCamas News; a list of officers for Wide West Lodge 43 of the IOOF of Camas; a close of business report from June 30, 1922, for the

First National Bank of Camas; a listing of IOOF members; a document that detailed the constitution and by-laws of the Rebekah Lodge; and a document that detailed the constitution and by-laws of the IOOF Lodge.

The documents related to the IOOF organization are appropriate because the Crown Home Furnishings building was originally the site of the IOOF Hall. The building was also the original location of Swank & Co., a furniture and hardware business owned by Wilmer Swank.

According to Camas historian Sally Alves, the IOOF Swank building was one of the few structures in downtown Camas to avoid destruction in a Nov. 15, 1923, fire.

Alves was one of several local residents and interested persons who attended Tuesday morning's opening of the time capsule. Also on hand were current IOOF members Lonnie Belz and Casey O'Dell.

"I wasn't in the (IOOF) lodge at the time, but I was here when they built the building," the 95-year-old Belz said. He recognized one of the names on the list of IOOF officers in the time capsule as being his first boss in the paper mill.

After opening the time capsule, Fischer said finding it was "kind of a happy thing in a sad situation." He added that a decision has not yet been made on donating the items in the time capsule to any local historical organizations.



A TIME CAPSULE, found in the rubble of Crown Home Furnishings Monday, was opened by the business' owner, Alan Fischer, this morning. It contained newspapers, coins and other documents. (Staff photo by Chris Clohessy)